



## **The Rock of Gibraltar – or Building a Website Foundation That Won't Drive You to Drink**

When it's time to create a brand new web presence, or remodel an old one, don't panic. Web technology has advanced to a point that you no longer need to be (or to hire!) a coder or a designer to create a good looking, user-friendly website. And even better, you do NOT have to spend the baby's milk money in order to have a great website. There are several ready-made platforms, and after working with all the standard options, I'd like to encourage you to consider using a blog platform, specifically WordPress, as your website content management system. Here's why:

1. A blog platform, specifically WordPress (WordPress.org) is a set of free code that has already been created with all of the nuts and bolts that you need to build a full-fledged website, or just a simple blog.
2. If you are a do-it-yourselfer, but have been thwarted by complicated web code, you will find that using WordPress is very simple to use and there are tons of free tutorials on the internet.
3. There are huge advantages to using a blogging platform to put your content out on the web, because of two things:
  - a. No coding needed, and the platform has been around for a long time, so it is very stable and dependable; and
  - b. Search engines send out encoded messages called spiders all through the internet to decide what websites get found when someone does a search. With a typical website, if you want to make changes you either have to have the knowledge and tools to do that or you have to wait around for weeks for your web person to make your changes (if you can get 'em to do it at all!). With WordPress you can change content, add new pages, or write blog posts whenever you want. There are no additional tools and learning to use WordPress is fast and easy. Making regular changes to your site means that the spiders recognize that a change has been made, so they are constantly re-indexing your content, which makes you much more visible on the internet.
4. Blog platforms are so popular that hundreds of programmers rush to create add-ons for them. That means that you can get added functionality for your blog without having to pay a custom programmer. For example, you can create an entire website with a blog platform, and you can add things like membership programs, ecommerce, forums, media players, surveys, and on and on and on. Some add-ons do have a cost, but it is usually minimal (\$25 - \$100 typically).
5. Many blog platforms are free – WordPress (wordpress.org, not wordpress.com), which is wildly popular now, is entirely free. Many host providers have an instant install of WordPress for free, or you can install it yourself, or you can have it installed by a professional web developer. Basic install without any customization should be less than \$100. Simple customization can be done by an industrious blog owner, or you can contract with a professional, but you save the entire cost of building the foundation of the site.

6. Blogs can easily be linked to other social media – so that when you write a new blog post, your blog talks to Twitter and FaceBook and puts out a notification that you have written something new on your blog. This kind of networked social media is very powerful.

Of course there are lots of blog platforms available. Some are free programs that are available on the internet, but all of your content is stored on someone else's servers. These are systems like Blogger, Typepad, and WordPress.com (there are 2 versions of WordPress – one is the version that you install on your own host provider, the other is hosted by WordPress on the internet). Some of these online systems charge a monthly fee – be careful that you don't end up paying more for an online blog platform than you could have paid for your own hosting account and a much more flexible self-installed system. Be aware that if the online blog company has an issue, you can lose your content for days or even weeks (this happened to a client of mine). The more widely preferred system is to download the free WordPress.org system and then you have complete freedom to modify and customize it. With a blog platform installed on your own host provider you maintain full control of your content and you can easily make backups -- and a good host provider will keep backups for you as well.

A word on customization: Thesis. This is a reasonably priced WordPress theme. That means that a very clever web developer took the basics of WordPress and figured out how to make it even easier for users. Thesis has very simple customization controls, and really great search engine optimization tools built in. On top of that, they have a very active and very helpful user forum. Go check it out – links are below.

The bottom line: Don't go spending thousands of dollars on a custom website. Take advantage of the tools that are freely available. If you have time to invest a little sweat equity in your business, or you enjoy learning new technology, you can build your own WordPress site. If you just don't want to mess with it, WordPress is still the way to go. Hire someone to set it up, customize it, and teach you how to maintain your own content. But don't get sucked into paying thousands of dollars for a WordPress customization.

Build it smart – you'll enjoy the experience of creating your new site, and your users will have a great experience when they visit your site.

**Reverse Disclaimer:** I am NOT an affiliate of anybody's. I recommend things because I have had a good experience. I make no guarantee that you will have a good experience, but I hope so. I'm not recommending it just to make a buck.

**WordPress:** <http://wordpress.org/>

**Thesis:** <http://diythemes.com/>

*Note: If you find errors (ones that really matter to the user, not a comma in the wrong place), please let me know so that I can make corrections. [denise@funmonger.com](mailto:denise@funmonger.com)*